

# Leaves of Absence

A leave of absence is defined as “a temporary period of non-enrollment,” and may be granted for several reasons, including due to academic, personal, or medical needs. The standards for, and the process of, each type of leave is described below (Types of Leaves). All leaves of absence will be entered on the Transcript as “Leave of Absence” with no distinction among the several types of leave.

## Obligations and Implications

The leave of absence does not relieve the student of obligation to comply with the policies and procedures of the Medical College, including, but not limited to, those standards governing course remediation and repetition, completion of academic work and time frames for completion of the Medical College curriculum. Taking a leave of absence may have implications for student loan deferment/repayment status, housing, healthcare coverage, or financial aid eligibility. Students should investigate these implications, where relevant to the students’ personal situations, prior to applying for a leave of absence. The Senior Associate Dean for Education has discretion regarding a leave status and the continuation of Medical College benefits or services, such as housing, healthcare coverage, and utilization of Medical College facilities. All students who are approved for any type of leave of absence will be charged a fee to continue their student status with the Medical College. Students on leave may also be charged other fees to continue to receive Medical College benefits or services.

During a leave of absence, a student is not enrolled in a Weill Cornell Medical College course and is not permitted to undertake College course assignments or participate in its classes or exams. The student is also not required to complete required academic milestones that are not part of the course, but which may fall during the time of the leave. Per the policy of the National Board of Medical Examiners, the registrar may certify that student on leave can take a USMLE Step examination.

## Timeframe

Leaves generally are granted for a defined period. The endpoint of the leave is ordinarily at the end of the Spring semester (June 30) or the Fall semester (December 31). Students may not return from a leave of absence during the same semester during which they went out on leave; in effect, the student returns at the start of a semester, i.e., July 1 (Fall) or January 1 (Spring). Students may request an extension of their leave of absence. An extension can only be granted after consultation with the designated medical education dean, i.e., the Associate Dean of Student Affairs or the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for personal/medical and academic leaves of absence, respectively. The designated dean will then, if approving the student’s request, make the formal recommendation to the Senior Associate Dean for Education, who may grant the extension. Any request for an extension should be made at least thirty (30) calendar days before the date of expected return. Students who do not return to full-time status at the end of an approved leave, and who have not applied for and been approved for continuation of their leave of absence status, will be considered to have withdrawn from the Medical College. Under certain

circumstances, a student who wishes to return from a leave may have to satisfy previously set conditions for return.

## **Leaves Initiated by the Student**

### **Academic**

Students who have been granted admission to pursue a different course of study or degree at another institution may request an academic leave of absence for the period they are matriculated at the institution for the course of study (for example, one academic year). To apply for an academic leave, a student must submit a copy of the letter of admission to the degree program, along with a written request for a leave, to the **Associate Dean of Academic Affairs** who may recommend it to the Senior Associate Dean for Education. The request must include the beginning and ending dates of the program to which the student has been admitted. Students are expected to return to the medical school curriculum as full-time students after the end date of the academic leave. Academic leaves will not exceed two academic years.

### **Medical**

A medical leave of absence is granted by the Senior Associate Dean for Education upon the recommendation of the **Associate Dean of Student Affairs**, the student's treating physician and/or an administrative physician consultant appointed by the Medical College. Documentation from a medical provider is not required for initiating a medical leave. The purpose of the medical leave is to enable students to seek treatment for a health-related condition that interferes with the student's ability to undertake the curriculum or that poses a threat to the health and safety of the student or others. The term of the leave is for a period up to one year, based upon the recommendation of the treating physician and/or administrative physician consultant. Ordinarily, the leave of absence will terminate at the end of either the Fall or Spring semesters and exceptions may be made only in extreme cases by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. The leave may be extended for up to a second and final year based upon the recommendation of the treating physician and/or an administrative physician consultant. To return from a medical leave, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs must be given documentation from the student's provider confirming that the student is able to resume the curriculum requirements. Student medical issues are confidential and not maintained as a part of the academic record.

### **Personal**

The Senior Associate Dean for Education, upon the recommendation of the **Associate Dean of Student Affairs**, grants a personal leave of absence. A personal leave enables a student to take time off, in extenuating circumstances, to address issues of a personal nature, including those related to the health and well-being of a family member or partner. Personal leaves may not exceed one year; however, requests by students to extend their personal leave into a second year will be considered under exceptional circumstances. Ordinarily, the leave of absence will terminate at the end of either the Fall or Spring semesters and exceptions may be made only in extreme cases by the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. To apply for a personal leave of absence, students are required to discuss their needs with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs.

## **Return to the Curriculum Following a Medical Absence**

Medical clearance is required for a return to the curriculum from an excused medical absence that exceeds five consecutive class days. The purpose of medical clearance is to ensure that a student who has been excused from curricular requirements due to medical illness and wishes to return to the curriculum has obtained medical care and, in the best clinical judgment of the student's medical provider, is able to function safely and effectively in the learning environment.

### **Standard Medical Clearance**

*Standard Medical Clearance* documentation is required for students who wish to return to curriculum from a(n):

1. Emergent Medical Absence (Extended)
2. Medical Leave of Absence of any duration

*Standard Medical Clearance* is written signed documentation from the student's health care provider. The health care provider is a licensed health care professional, i.e., physician, clinical psychologist, licensed social worker who is familiar with the student's current medical condition and who attended to the student during the medical condition for which the student received an excused absence. The provider may be the long-term care provider or in the case of an acute medical illness, may be the treating medical provider or hospital attending who is most familiar with the student's recent condition. The provider may be a WCMC Student Health provider in the case where the student is under the care of the Student Health Care service.

Students should obtain the *Request for Medical Clearance* document from the Student Affairs website and have their healthcare provider submit it as soon as they decide the student is ready to return. Per the Leave of Absence policy (pp 100-102), a student wishing to return to the curriculum while on a medical leave of absence must obtain the medical clearance document at least 30 days prior to the expected end date of the leave.

Students who have difficulty obtaining medical clearance from the provider in a timely manner should inform the Associate Dean of Student Affairs who may be able to facilitate the process or suggest an alternative such as the use of WCM Student Health Services.

Upon receipt of the medical clearance documentation, the Associate Dean of Student Affairs will convene a meeting with the student and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs to review the medical clearance documents and discuss issues related to return to the curriculum. Based on this meeting, the following may occur:

1. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs decides that the student is ready to return to the curriculum and will inform the registrar and the student's course director that the student has been medically cleared to re-enter as of a specified date, copying the student of this notice. Per the

attendance policy, students who return to the curriculum following a medical absence are required to make up all work or activities that had been missed, to the satisfaction of the course director.

2. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs decides the student is ready to return to the curriculum with certain modifications/provisos and will inform the Registrar and the student's course director that the student has been medically cleared to re-enter as of a specified date, copying the student of this notice. Per the attendance policy, students who return to the curriculum following a medical absence are required to make up all work or activities that had been missed, to the satisfaction of the course director.

3. The Associate Dean of Student Affairs decides the student is not ready to return to the curriculum. The student has the option to take a medical leave of absence or extend an existing one. If the student does not wish to take a medical leave of absence or extend an existing one, the Associate Deans of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs will recommend to the Senior Associate Dean for Education an administrative medical consultation (described below).

### **Administrative Medical Consultation (AMC)**

An administrative medical consultant serves as an officially designated medical consultant to the Medical College. The selection of the appropriately qualified and relevant administrative medical consultant is the purview of the Senior Associate Dean, Education. The consultant may not have an assessment role in the curriculum nor a personal or family conflict of interest with the student or the student's health care provider.

*An Administrative Medical Consultation (AMC)* may be called in one or more of the following circumstances:

1. When the student fails to provide medical clearance documentation.
2. When, based on recommendations from the Associate Deans of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, the Senior Associate Dean for Education, deems the need for additional medical clearance.
3. When a student wishes to return from a medical leave of absence that has continued beyond ONE semester in duration for any reason AND has received medical clearance from a health care provider.
4. When in rare cases, requested by the Promotions and Graduation Committee (P&G).

Ordinarily, the administrative medical consultation, signed and provided in writing, will address the same topic areas as that indicated in a standard medical clearance document, plus any additional items the Senior Associate Dean for Education, the Promotion and Graduation (P&G) Committee, or the Associate Dean of Student Affairs deem should be addressed.

Once an AMC is indicated, the Senior Associate Dean for Education will make every effort to obtain an AMC within one week. Prior to the review of the AMC, the student will remain on their current excused absence status (for example, emergent extended absence or medical leave of absence). The Senior Associate Dean for Education will review the AMC documentation and

discuss it with the appropriate Medical College official(s), e.g., Associate Dean of Student Affairs, the P&G or Appeals Committee, or an Administrative Medical Consultant.

Once the Senior Associate Dean for Education confirms the student is medically cleared to return, the Senior Associate Dean for Education will convene a meeting with the student and the Associate Deans of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs to discuss the terms of re-entry and continued enrollment. Notices will be sent to the Registrar and the relevant course director that the student has been medically cleared to re-enter the curriculum as of a specified date and copy the student of this notice.

If the student has NOT been medically cleared, the student will not be able to return to the curriculum. The “return from medical leave” process would again be repeated in the future when the student wishes to return from medical leave.

If the student wishes to return to the curriculum but a) refuses to cooperate with obtaining the Administrative Medical Consultation, or b) refuses to comply with the stipulations set forth by the Senior Associate Dean for Education based on the AMC for return, or c) contests the findings of the AMC (i.e., “non-clearance”), the student will remain on an excused absence from the curriculum. The Associate Dean of Academic Affairs will then convene an emergency meeting of the P&G Committee to discuss the matter and share the results of the AMC with the committee. The P&G Committee may decide to request that the student extend their leave of absence and undergo a future AMC; may suspend the student from the curriculum and/or school privileges for a specified time period, pending the student’s compliance with obtaining an AMC or with the AMC recommendations; or may dismiss the student from the Medical College.

The student has the right to appeal the decision of the P&G Committee that denies their return to the curriculum to the Appeals Committee, in which case the appeals policy, procedures and time frame would take effect.

### **Return to Medical Studies from Leaves of Absence**

Prior to returning, the student should be in communication with the Medical College to notify the relevant offices of their anticipated return. The student should confirm with the Associate Dean of Student Affairs that they are returning from leave on the pre-scheduled date of return no less than 30 days before that pre-scheduled date. As part of the confirmation, the student should submit all required documentation that was stipulated in the leave of absence agreement (for example, medical clearance from provider, Registrar forms, the WCMC Intent to Return form). The student should also review their status with respect to student loan deferment/repayment status, housing, healthcare coverage, or financial aid eligibility.

At the time a leave of absence is granted, the Medical College determines the length of the leave and the conditions, if any, for a return from the leave of absence. Extensions of a leave of absence are not automatic, even if within the time frame permitted for the category of leave. A student who determines that he or she is not returning at the time scheduled for a leave to end should notify their intent to extend by emailing the Associate Dean (Student Affairs) as early as possible before the scheduled return date and no later than thirty (30) calendar days prior to the scheduled return date. This will allow time for the student to confer with the Associate Dean of

Student Affairs if needed about any extension request. The Associate Dean will request that the Senior Associate Dean, Education review the extension request no less than two (2) weeks before the date of scheduled return. These time periods will enable a student to learn whether an extension of the leave of absence can be granted, or if the student needs to make other arrangements.

If a student does not return from a leave at the conclusion of the set time period, and has not received an extension in writing, the individual will be administratively withdrawn from the Medical College. Similarly, if a student has not satisfied the criteria to return, if any, and has not received an extension in writing, he or she will be administratively withdrawn from the Medical College. No further action will be necessary to finalize the withdrawal.

## **Leaves Initiated by the Medical College**

### **Administrative Leave**

Under certain circumstances, a student experiencing difficulty in the medical school program may be permitted, or required, to take a leave of absence.

### **Involuntary Student Leave**

When there is an actual, or the threat of, community disruption of the Medical College or learning environment, including, for example, risk of harm to patients or others, the Medical College may place a student on an involuntary leave of absence. The Medical College is committed to protecting the learning environment. Separation of a student from the Medical College and its facilities may be necessary if there is sufficient evidence that the student is engaging in, or is likely to engage in, conduct and behavior that disrupts the learning environment of others.

This policy for **Involuntary Student Leave** is found in the WCM Policy Library as [OME 900.17](#)

The policy for the **Appeals Process** is found in the WCM Policy Library as [OME 900.06](#).